

## *Editorial*

### COGNITIVE SCIENCE, CONTINUOUS CREATION, AND ZYGON MOVING ON

#### THE NEW SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF RELIGION MOVING ON

The “Cognitive Science of Religion” and, more broadly, the new scientific study of religion, have been in the ascendant for several decades now. In *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, both proponents and critics now take stock of how far the field has come and what may be next for it. Lluís Oviedo has organized this issue’s symposium “The New Scientific Study of Religion Moving On,” which contains five contributions. In his Introduction, he reflects on the emergence of approaches in the new scientific study of religion that have overcome an overly reductionist stance, and that have opened up to more plural and multilevel approaches. The first contribution to the symposium is by one of the founding fathers of the cognitive science of religion, Robert McCauley. After explaining how he understands the cognitive science of religion (including interpreting it as not having implications on the truth status of religious claims), he addresses a typical reactionary response (protectionism), addresses three trends in the cognitive science of religion (cognitive neuroscientific study of religion; the study of differences between religious experiences and memories of such experiences; and the integration of cognitive and evolutionary explanations of religion), and highlights new atheists’ wrong use of it. The second contribution, by Connor Wood, exemplifies the third trend identified by McCauley. Wood integrates cognitive and evolutionary dimensions in his study of religious ritual, in particular ritual of the antistructural kind, where his interests lie not so much in the study of religious representations, but instead of religiously interpreted altered states of consciousness. He makes the empirical prediction that antistructural ritual may provide for cultural change in religions. The other three contributions are largely critical of the cognitive science of religion but open to engaging with the field and pointing to ways forward. In the third contribution, Konrad Szocik argues that some cognitive explanations of religious beliefs, which emphasize their adaptive value for survival, overvalue the putative role of cognition. He claims that there are some domains in the field of religion and religious components that could be acquired and transmitted despite or even against alleged cognitive biases, and he pleads for combining a cognitive account with functional naturalistic approaches. The fourth contribution, by Hans Van Eyghen, argues in a similar vein against there being something about

the human mind that disposes it to form religious beliefs. He argues for a “predictive coding” framework where religious belief is learned and part of a larger cultural constitution, and he integrates ideas from the cognitive science of religion into such a framework. In the fifth, and final, contribution, Léon Turner argues that evolutionary and cognitive accounts of religion typically depend upon a view of cognition that conceptually isolates the mind from its particular social and physical environmental contexts, and that they unwittingly embrace an abstract individualist view of individual personhood that Christian theologians have explicitly battled against. He shows that there is sufficient room left for supplementary theories.

#### THE CONCEPT OF CONTINUOUS CREATION

In a thematic section on “The Concept of Continuous Creation,” Fabien Revol publishes in a two-part article the main findings from his 1,000-page double doctoral dissertation in French (defended in theology in Paris and in philosophy in Lyon in 2013, and titled *Le concept de création continue: Histoire, critique théologique et philosophique, essai de renouvellement dans le dialogue de la théologie avec les sciences de la nature par la médiation de la philosophie*). This makes his impressive work also available, albeit in summary form, to English-speaking readers. The concept of continuous creation is used to theologically interpret natural novelty as a furtherance of God’s creative action in time. But how can this best be done? In the first article, Revol seeks to understand the meaning of the concept of continuous creation in its historical context, including critiques mounted against the concept. The second article aims to renew the concept of continuous creation, engaging with philosophy of nature and interpreting scientific research into the evolution of life, and subsequently reformulating the concept of continuous creation in a dynamic perspective. Revol concludes “If the universe of possibilities of creation proceeds from the Divine Word by the will of the Father, as the first timeless *ex nihilo* creative moment, the Holy Spirit lets, in a second creative moment, the universe of possibilities proceed continuously through a creative partnership in which all creatures are involved. Created novelty is the expression of a procession of one possibility among others, which has been selected by creatures during the evolutionary process, due to the interdependence of constitutive interactions and the propensities in which creatures are situated.” Readers of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* will surely recognize a Whiteheadian influence here.


#### OTHER ARTICLES

There are four articles to start this issue. Will Mason-Wilkes analyzes film sequences focusing on DNA in two BBC nonfiction science television

programs and identifies contrasting “religious” and “secular” representations of science. Thomas Aechtner aims to improve evolution advocacy by translating strategies used to address vaccine hesitancies and enhance immunization uptake policies. Colin Patterson assesses what a cultural evolutionary approach to modernity might mean for Christian faith; he explains the theory, in particular its so-called “kin-influence hypotheses,” and outlines its consequences. Pia Vuolanto, Paula Nissilä, and Ali Qadir review the literature on science and religion in Nordic countries and highlight that there is scope for more social scientific contributions to that literature. Finally, the issue ends with my review of Hans Radder’s *From Commodification to the Common Good: Reconstructing Science, Technology, and Society*.

#### ZYGON MOVING ON

As part of solidifying the governance of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, the journal has now (after 54 years) been incorporated as a legal entity, a charitable 501(c)(3) corporation registered in the State of Illinois. The new Joint Publication Board (its Board of Directors) is composed of three members each from the two original sponsoring organizations of the journal, the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) and the Center for Advanced Study in Religion and Science (CASIRAS), and from a third sponsoring organization, the International Society for Science and Religion (ISSR). I very much welcome the ISSR to the governance of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*!

Arthur C. Petersen 

Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy,  
University College London, London, UK  
arthur.petersen@ucl.ac.uk